

NEW BEDFORD
FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

ANNUAL REPORT

1982 - 1983

NEW BEDFORD FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

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The highlight of the year, unfortunately, was the adverse publicity the Library received when it was announced that the City and the Library would be sued. The basis of the suit would be the alleged neglect of a young woman by the police who had arrested her because of an overdue book on a warrant from the Third District Court of Bristol. The woman in question had returned her book and paid the fine but had not appeared before the Court to clear herself, so a warrant was issued.

The Trustees reviewed the policy which charged the Library Administration with recovering material overdue six months or longer through Court action under Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 266. The Policy which had been in place since 1978 has been an effective tool for the recovery of about \$8000 a year in overdue books. The Policy has been the means of obtaining a response from delinquent borrowers who had, until receipt of a Show Cause letter from the Court, ignored all efforts by the Library to contact them. Those who offered good and sufficient reasons were removed from the Court List, as were, of course, those who then returned the material and paid their fines.

Of the approximately twelve thousand overdues sent each year, ninety-eight percent result in the return of the material. About 300 receive Show Cause letters and only three have actually appeared since 1978. Of these one pleaded "not guilty" and won, one failed to appear because he was in jail on another charge, and one was the woman who announced her intention to sue the City Police and the Library.

The Trustees decided, in spite of considerable pressure from the media and other sources (all of which were outraged that a city institution should take such steps to recover property illegally retained) not to modify the policy. Alternatives available, such as sending a constable after the material, or using a collection agency, were considered and rejected as being expensive and ineffective.

Other events of note during the year were the retirement in late Fall 1982 of long standing staff, Doris Pitts and Johanna Walsh, both of whom will be missed. Ana Maria Matias resigned to take a position as legal secretary.

The Friends of the New Bedford Free Public Library solicited local banks for contributions to be used for the restoration of the Library's nineteenth century art. Many responded positively and several works were cleaned and restored, including six paintings depicting the activities of a whaling voyage. Donations gratefully received totalled \$3100

and were from: BayBank, New Bedford Institution for Savings, The Luzo Corporation, Mr. Anthony Gould, and Mrs. Sarah Delano. The "Friends" also continued their valuable support of those needed activities and projects which are not easily funded from the Library budget. They gave \$200 for children's programs, and added \$4500 to the donations from the banks and other benefactors to cover the costs of restoration.

The Polaroid Corporation, as part of a nationwide donation to public libraries, gave us six Sun Cameras to be loaned on condition we report the number of times they have circulated.

The Trustees awarded scholarships totaling \$1996, the majority of this amount to staff members pursuing their education. Sharon Cabral received \$744, Ann Rodrigues \$400, and Francine Alfonse \$540. Gardner Chace received \$312.

The Trustees also approved a revision of their Policy Manual and accepted the Library Staff Manual during 1982-1983.

The first attempt to change the Library Law to permit the establishment of a member controlled regional library district failed. The bill submitted by Representative David Nelson and Senator William MacLean was reported out from the Committee on State Administration as "Not recommended".

I and the staff thank the Friends for their continued support, and the Trustees for their guidance and wise direction during the year. Both Trustees and Administration feel strongly that the people of New Bedford and the surrounding area deserve the best library we can afford and are determined to maintain the standards necessary which will ensure that they continue to receive a high level of service.

The staff supports these concepts in their continuing dedication to the tasks at hand and to the furtherance of their education to improve the quality of service.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurence H. Solomon
Director